

Support the Development of a Strategic Plan for Higher Education

(Section 12 of SB 1011, and HB 6257)

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I'm here to urge your support for a modified Section 12 of SB 1011. Governor Malloy has given voice to the recognition that all of us have that education in general, and higher education in particular, is critical to the future economic development of the state. And a strategic plan for higher education is absolutely necessary to point us in the right direction, and establish clearly the part each unit of higher education must play. The Governor (in this section), the Program Review and Investigations Committee (in its December report on Higher Education Governance), and this Committee (in HB 6257), have all made a strong case for the development of that strategic plan. The strong points of each of these proposals need to be integrated into a single bill.

1. Require the development of a strategic master plan for higher education, which sets a public agenda for higher education, as described in the PRI report. This plan should be developed by a prestigious leadership group, with a process for public and stakeholder participation that allows for ample discussion and comment before and after proposed drafts of the plan are created (Section 12, lines 481-484). The constituent units of public higher education as well as the state's independent colleges should be fully involved in the discussion and comment process. In general, the final bill requiring this mandate should reconcile the language of HB 6257, Section 12 of SB 1011, and the recommendations of Program Review's December Report.

2. Don't put the cart before the horse. We need a strategic plan before restructuring occurs. In the language of the Program Review Committee,

Determine System Goals Before Considering Governance Structure Overhaul. The governance structure is a key component in carrying out an overall vision for higher education. It is important, therefore, that it is aligned with that vision. Connecticut as a state needs to develop and agree upon its vision for higher education, and then, if desired, consider and implement any changes to either the current board responsibilities or the constituent unit structure. Governance structure changes made now, before goals and policies are set, could be ill-suited to the vision that emerges from the public agenda group. (p. 32) (underlining added)

3. Planning before re-organizing will not add back to the bottom line of this biennial budget. All of the proposed savings in higher education come from an across-the-board 10% cut to block grant appropriations. None of the savings comes from reorganization. The block grants for the constituent units proposed to be reorganized under a Board of Regents are reduced by the same percentage amount as the block grants for UConn and UConn Health Center, which are not subject to reorganization. Authorized staffing for General Fund positions in the units proposed to be reorganized under a Board of Regents is actually 67 positions more than if reorganization did not occur. And any estimates of potential savings from potential position reductions as a consequence of proposed reorganization do not exceed the 10% block grant reduction.